Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 18

Introduction

As Paul is winding down his second missionary journey, he establishes a great work in the city of Corinth. In chapter 18, Luke shares some very personal experiences of Paul from which we can relate and take great comfort.

Content

1. The moments of discouragement (vs. 1-8).

Have you ever become discouraged in doing the work of the Lord? Of course you have. We all do regardless of the position or calling.

What are some things that cause us to become discouraged in doing the work of the Lord?

- The negative attitude of people.
- Criticism and lack of appreciation.
- Feelings of being unproductive.
- Plain exhaustion and weariness.

These were likely some of the same things that caused Paul to become weary and lash back at the Jews. “But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook his robe and told them, “Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

- The lack of reception in Athens
- A 55 mile walk from Athens to Corinth.
- Observance of the sin and idolatry in Corinth.
- Continued hostility from the Jews (his own people).

Paul clearly became discouraged as he began his work in Corinth. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 to see his later explanation of this in his letter to the church.

Some people refer to this state as the Elijah Syndrome. The Elijah Syndrome is an extreme feeling of disappointment, loneliness, and failure which often follows a time of great success. Immediately after having boldly and publicly stood up against the antagonistic prophets of Ba’al, Elijah, devoid of energy, longed for death under the broom tree (1 Kings 19:1).

The Elijah Syndrome is also be characterized by the failure to live up to one’s unrealistic expectations.

We all have our moments of discouragement and disappointment. We all have times in our life when we feel like we are all alone in our efforts. We would do well to recognize discouragement for what it is and recognize the causes.

2. The Lord’s cures for discouragement (vs. 9-17).

What are some things you do to deal with discouragement? Go shopping, get alone, eat, take a break or vacation, pray, etc.

Luke does not hide Paul’s discouragement from us. He lays it out there for us to see. But Luke also takes great are to allow us to see that God recognized Paul’s discouraged state and intervenes for His servant.
What things does God do to lift up and encourage Paul in the ministry?

- He gave him close Christian friends (Priscilla, Aquila and Justus).
- He sends Silas and Timothy his way.
- He gives him a vision to not be afraid.
- He directs him to continue to speak.
- He assures Paul that He is with him (how awesome).
- He assures Paul he will not be hurt (harmed beyond what he can take).
- He assures Paul there will be people to help.

What more could Paul possibly ask for? God promised good Christian friends. He encourages him to continue in his calling and assures him that Christ is in control and watching over him.

Furthermore, observe the Roman Proconsul Gallio who does the bidding of God without even knowing it. He has nothing to do with the word games of the Jews and kicks them out of his court. This is amazing evidence of the promise of Christ.

I learned a long time ago that God has people. They may be in the form of Christians who are summoned to support and encourage his children or they may be non-Christians who unwittingly serve His purposes. Either way, God will use people to accomplish His work.

The appearance of the Lord to Paul was a tender moment for a weary apostle. It was exactly what he needed. Paul was afraid and tempted to not speak in the light of the conflict. Paul needed some fresh encouragement and a fresh encounter with Christ. What Paul received was:

- A deeper love to replace a great fear.
- A gift of courage to replace caution.
- An abiding Presence in alarming circumstances.
- An unlimited help against ultimate hurts.
- A freedom from loneliness in fellowship with Christ’s children.

Paul needed a revival bathed in the love of Christ and that is exactly what he received. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promised His disciples He would always be with them and here He was making the same promise to Paul.

Lessons for you and me are plenty. We must recognize the following:

- None of us are immune from discouragement.
- Discouragement can come in the midst of or following great success.
- We need to be honest about confessing our discouragement.
- Our Lord always has His eye on our circumstance.
- Our Lord is with you regardless of the circumstance.
- Our Lord will not place more on us than we can stand.
- Our Lord often uses other people to strengthen us.
- Our Lord commands us to continue the good work He is doing through us.
- Our Lord will work through others to make the way for us to do His work.

As we will see in the remainder of this chapter and the remainder of Acts, Paul receives the needed love revival from Christ and continues with God’s calling. He does not stop speaking to the Jews and experiences many successes in his continued ministry.

Christ is perfectly faithful to Paul.
3. Busy about the Lord’s work (vs. 18-23).

Our text confirms Paul was right back in the saddle. He remained a “good while” in Corinth. Then he sailed for Syria, on to Jerusalem and back to Antioch to finish his second missionary journey and report on the work.

But when Paul left he had two new friends with him. By the time he arrived in Ephesus, he was sporting a new haircut. We do not know the exact details but most likely the hair cut was the result of a Nazarite Vow.

The Nazarite Vow was a voluntary Jewish custom where one desired to separate themselves to the Lord for a determined season or purpose. This vow could have been associated with his determination to get back to Jerusalem. It could also have been his revival experience and determination to continue spreading the gospel. It could also have been a way of displaying his renewed commitment to his Jewish heritage which had so disappointed him of recent.

We would do well not to make too much of the hair cutting. What we should observer is that upon arriving at Ephesus, he went straight to the synagogue and begin teaches Christ as the Messiah to the Jews. And, they received him so well that they asked him to stay for a longer period.

Note that Paul’s revival experience had him doing the very thing he declared he would no longer do. Sometimes we say things in our frustration that we later regret. That’s ok. We all say things we regret and we all exaggerate in moments of frustration.

What is not ok is to stubbornly stand by our words when the Lord is teaching us differently. We must learn to listen to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We must allow the Holy Spirit to minister to us in order for us to minister to others.

Conclusion

Though none of us have made the kind of sacrifices Paul made, we have been in moments of success and failure, delight and discouragement.

We would do well to ask ourselves if we have been faithful in God’s calling. There is no doubt each of us have experienced our moments of discouragement. The question is have we received the assurances of Christ or have we turned to other sources for comfort?

Illus: Uncle Butch the preacher who became discouraged and quit the ministry only to end up in divorce, etc.

When discouragement comes, we need turn to our Lord for the same love and assurance that Paul received. He (Christ / Holy Spirit) will provide exactly what is needed to continue the good work.

Note: We will cover the remainder of chapter 18 with chapter 19 as we look at religion vs. relationship.